


SOPHOCLES' *AIAX*: *HYBRIS*, FOOLISHNESS AND GOOD SENSE

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EL *ÁYAX* DE SÓFOCLES: *HYBRIS*, NECEDAD Y SENTIDO COMÚN.
UNA COMPARACIÓN CON *ANTÍGONA*

La desobediencia a la autoridad cívica, el cambio de perspectiva dentro de la amistad —i. e., quien era o debería ser un amigo es visto como un enemigo— y el tema del entierro hacen de la tragedia *Áyax* una candidata apropiada para una comparación con *Antígona*. De hecho, una comparación entre las dos tragedias ya ha sido propuesta, y habitualmente se han establecido paralelos entre *Antígona* y *Áyax*, por un lado, y Creonte y los Atridas, por otro. Siguiendo las líneas de un estudio previo sobre la *Antígona* de Sófocles, el presente trabajo tiene como meta comparar *Áyax* y *Antígona* con referencia a un tema y una terminología específicos relacionados con la necedad y la sabiduría. *Antígona* y *Áyax* son generalmente asociados uno con el otro en su necia rebelión contra aquellos que están en posición de autoridad (respectivamente Creonte y los Atridas). Sin embargo, como argumenté en un trabajo anterior, mientras la necedad de *Antígona* lo es solamente en apariencia, la de *Áyax* es real, basada en hechos reales, rayando en *hybris*, lo que le hace similar a Creonte y no a *Antígona*. Por otro lado, los Atridas son diferentes de Creonte, y no sus similares, porque evitan actuar estúpidamente y caer en errores de juicio, debido a falta de sentido común, mientras están envueltos en el asunto del entierro. Realmente, los Atridas evitan la *hybris* de Creonte al respetar las «inmutables leyes no escritas de Zeus», lo que los hace, en una cierta manera, similares a *Antígona*. Un análisis léxico más detallado de la aparición de los

Disobedience to civic authority, shift of perspective within friendship —that is, who was or should be friend is then regarded as enemy—, and burial issue make the tragedy *Aiix* an appropriate candidate for a comparison with *Antigone*. Indeed, a comparison between the two tragedies has been already proposed, and parallels have been usually established between *Antigone* and *Aiix*, on the one hand; Creon and the Atridae, on the other. Along the lines of a previous study of mine on Sophocles' *Antigone*, the present paper aims at comparing *Aiix* and *Antigone* with reference to a specific theme and terminology, i.e. those pertaining foolishness and wisdom. *Antigone* and *Aiix* are usually associated with each other in their foolish rebellion to those who are in authority (respectively Creon and the Atridae). As argued in the previous paper, while, however, that of *Antigone* is foolishness only in all appearance, the foolishness of *Aiix* is a real, factual one bordering on *hybris*, which makes him a counterpart of Creon rather than of *Antigone*. On the other hand, the Atridae differ from Creon —rather than being his counterpart— in that they avoid acting foolishly, and falling for a mistake of judgment, i.e. for a lack of good sense, while dealing with the burial issue. Indeed, the Atridae avoid Creon's *hybris* by finally respecting the «unshakable and unwritten laws of Zeus» which makes them, in some way, a counterpart of *Antigone*. A closer lexical analysis of the occurrences of words pertaining

términos relacionados con la necedad y la sabiduría, tales como ἄνοια, ἄφρων/ἄφροσύνη - σωφροσύνη, φρονεῖν - μὴ φρονεῖν, μωρία, ἀβουλία, δυσβουλία, ha conducido a estos resultados.

Palabras clave: Necedad; locura; *hybris*; sabiduría; sentido común; Áyax y Creonte; Áyax y Antígona; Agamenón, Menelao y Creonte; Tiresias; Hemón; Odiseo.

foolishness and wisdom —such as ἄνοια, ἄφρων/ἄφροσύνη - σωφροσύνη, φρονεῖν - μὴ φρονεῖν, μωρία, ἀβουλία, δυσβουλία etc.— has led to these results.

Keywords: Foolishness; madness; *hybris*; wisdom; good sense; Ajax and Creon; Ajax and Antigone; Agamemnon, Menelaus and Creon; Teiresias; Haemon; Odysseus.

I. INTRODUCTION

In a previous paper on Sophocles' *Antigone*¹, I discussed the presence of a dichotomous motif underlying the entire tragedy, namely that concerning the dialectic between wisdom/good sense and foolishness. Through a lexical analysis I pointed out the occurrences of a specific terminology throughout the tragedy, such a terminology that connotes the two main characters, Antigone and Creon, as being, the first, «apparently foolish» —despite the general impression that the occurrence of terms of foolishness related to Antigone provokes—, and, the second, «really foolish» —despite the acknowledgment that is often reserved for his wisdom and good sense—. While Antigone's foolishness consists of her disobedience to a man-made law and to civic authority, that of Creon consists of obstinacy in believing in his own thoughts, and thus in refusing to listen to those who are able to provide him with appropriate advice, such an obstinacy that borders on an act of *hybris* by violating the gods' law in name of his own persuasion to be always right². As a matter of fact, eventually Creon must yield and recognize his own foolishness, when he admits that the best way to end one's own life is by «preserving the established laws» (S., *Ant.* 1113-1114). These «established laws» are the same as the ones Antigone claimed in defense of her action (S., *Ant.* 450-455, 902-913, 921-928). Her obstinate disobedience, i.e. the essence of her lack of good sense, cannot thus be regarded as real foolishness since it is a «reverent/holy» obstinacy in obedience to the gods. As argued in my previous paper, the difference between Antigone's foolishness —which

¹ R. Lauriola, «Wisdom and foolishness: a further point in the interpretation of Sophocles' *Antigone*», *Hermes* 134, 2007, pp. 389-405.

² Cf. S., *Ant.* 683-687, 705-706, about which see Lauriola, art. cit., pp. 397-398.

is only apparent— and Creon's foolishness —mistaken as good sense— is significantly expressed through different terms denoting foolishness *per se*, terms which appear to be almost exclusive either of Antigone or of Creon. While ἀφροσύνη, ἄνοια are typical and almost exclusive of Antigone, μὴ φρονεῖν, μωρία, ἀβουλία - δυσβουλία are typical and almost exclusive of Creon³. When it happens that terms typical of Creon's foolishness (e.g. μωρία, δυσβουλία) refer to Antigone, too, they reflect the view that others have of the heroine, which —in the end— is proved to be a mistaken view.

The motif of disobedience to the civic authority together with both the switching from friend to enemy status —i.e., who was or should be friend is then regarded as enemy— and the burial issue, makes *Aiix* an appropriate candidate for a comparison with *Antigone*. A comparison exactly between these two tragedies has been already proposed⁴, and parallels have been usually established between Antigone and *Aiix*, on the one hand, and Creon and the Atridae, on the other: «it is Antigone who finds herself compared to Ajax, while Creon finds his counterpart in the Atridae»⁵. The present study aims at comparing *Aiix* and *Antigone* specifically with reference to the theme and terminology of foolishness and wisdom at which I have hinted above. By applying a lexical analysis I shall argue that the occurrences, in *Aiix*, of terms that turned out to exclusively refer to Creon's foolishness in *Antigone*, indeed prove that: *a*) the foolishness by which *Aiix* is affected resembles that of Creon⁶ rather than that of Antigone, as it is usually discussed; *b*) what the Atridae —especially Agamemnon— eventually tend to do, while dealing with the burial of *Aiix*, is exactly to avoid acting foolishly, and thus falling for a mistake of judgment, i.e. for a lack of good sense as, on the contrary, Creon did while dealing with the burial of Polyneices⁷. In this light a parallel can finally be established between the «lessons» implied in both tragedies, that is —to paraphrase Sophocles— «bodies grown too great and stupid

³ Cf. Lauriola, art. cit., pp. 402-403.

⁴ Cf. R. P. Winnington-Ingram, *Sophocles: An Interpretation*, Cambridge-New York, 1980, pp. 117-118 and n. 3.

⁵ Cf. Winnington-Ingram, op. cit., p. 118.

⁶ I mean the foolishness of Creon as it has been analyzed in my previous work (Lauriola, art. cit., p. 405).

⁷ About the burial theme in *Aiix*, see, e.g., R. C. Jebb, *Sophocles. The Plays and Fragments. Part vii: The Ajax*, Cambridge, 1893, pp. xxviii-xxxii; P. Holt, «Ajax's Burial in Early Greek Epic», *AJPh* 113, 1992, pp. 319-331; J. R. March, «Sophocles' Ajax: the death and burial of a hero», *BICS* 38, 1991-1993, pp. 1-36.

(ἀνόνητα) fall through grievous afflictions at the hands of the gods, whenever a man is born with a human nature, but does not think in accordance to his human φρονή» (S., *Ai*ax 758-761)⁸.

This is exactly what happened both to Ajax and to Creon.

II. AIAX'S FOOLISHNESS: LEXICAL AND CONCEPTUAL COMPARISON WITH ANTIGONE AND CREON

The essence of Ajax' foolishness, i.e. his lack of good sense/wisdom, is well described by the hero himself in his last speech (*Ai*. 646-692), when he realizes that one must yield to, obey and respect the gods and those who are in authority, in his case, Agamemnon and Menelaus (*Ai*. 667-668). To behave in this way means 'to be minded-sensible/to have good sense' (σωφρονεῖν: *Ai*. 677), which Ajax has proved not to be or to have, and learns it only after the deeds of his foolishness.

1. ἄνους and ἄφρων

According to the words of the hero in the lines mentioned above, the refusal to bend to the rulers' demand of acquiescence and obedience only partially connotes Ajax's foolishness. This refusal is namely that lack of good sense which is commonly ascribed to Antigone, who —as it is known— refused to obey Creon, the ruler.

In *Antigone*, from a lexical point of view this kind of foolishness is described through two categories of words: ἄνους/ἄνοια, ἄφρων/ἄφροσύνη⁹. Antigone is, indeed, said ἄνους (*Ant*. 66-68, 99) or ἄφρων (*Ant*. 383). But, Antigone's disobedience is a holy one (*Ant*. 74), justifiable in the name of her respect of the gods («It was not Zeus who made this proclamation...» *Ant*. 450). Only those who really lack good sense can mistake it as foolishness. Therefore —as previously argued— she is ἄνους and ἄφρων in the others'

⁸ τὰ γὰρ περισσὰ κἀνόνητα σώματα / πίπτειν βαρείαις πρὸς θεῶν δυσπραξίαις / ἔφασχ' ὁ μάντις, ὅστις ἀνθρώπου φύσιν / βλαστὼν ἔπειτα μὴ κατ' ἀνθρώπων φρονῇ. Cf. also S., *Ai*. 127-133 (on which below) and S., *Ant*. 1113-1114. The above quoted translations of *Ai*ax are adapted from A. F. Garvie, *Sophocles. Ajax* – edited with introduction, translation and commentary by A.F.G., Warminster, 1998.

⁹ For a complete analysis and discussion cf. Lauriola, art. cit., pp. 396-400.

eyes, that is, only in all appearance. As a matter of fact, significantly both kinds of terms (ἄνους, ἄφρων) are truly addressed to those who are really foolish in that they do not care about gods' rules. With reference to ἄνους and, more generally, to the νοῦς-words in *Antigone*, though the occurrences are quite exclusive of Antigone herself by still reflecting only the others' viewpoint on her deeds, there is a significant single case that can be by irony referred to Creon's real and specific ἄνοια. In *Ant.* 281 Creon calls ἄνους the chorus who has just attempted to explain the burial of Polynices as a sort of miracle performed by the gods. The excessive reaction of Creon speaks in favor of his blind exclusion of the gods in all matters, which by irony makes him the real ἄνους. So ἄνους is Ajax.

In Sophocles' *Ajax*, both categories of words (ἄνους/ἄνοια, ἄφρων/ἄφροσύνη) are used to describe the foolish behavior of Ajax, namely a foolishness which consists of both not listening to those who give good advice (*Ai.* 763), and being too much confident in one's own thought (*Ai.* 766-770) rather than realizing how much better is to respect and yield to the gods (*Ai.* 666-667). As a matter of fact, the foolishness of Ajax consists first of all, and foremost, of an act of irreverence and *hybris* toward the gods, as it is well proved by Athena's speech at the beginning of the tragedy (*Ai.* 127-133)¹⁰. And obstinacy to listen to those who are able to give good advice, and to yield and respect gods' laws is exactly that affecting Creon and determining his foolishness. As Ajax dares neglect his father's advice and the gods' respect when he refuses Athena's help in his ἄνοια - ἄφροσύνη (*Ai.* 762-777), so does Creon when he confirms his intention to kill Antigone and refuses to listen to Haimon, no matter also what Zeus of blood-kinship would think: «Let her keep invoking the Zeus of blood-kinship» (*Ant.* 658-659), which is to say «let's not care of Zeus' laws»¹¹.

In *Ajax* this kind of foolishness, which borders on *hybris*, is also described by φρήν-words (μὴ κατ' ἄνθρωπον φρονεῖν *Ai.* 761, 777), i.e., by the same category of words that, in *Antigone*, connote Creon's lack of good sense bor-

¹⁰ See also S., *Ajax* 771-773. On Ajax' *hybris*, see N. R. E. Fisher, *Hybris: a Study in the Values of Honour and Shame in Ancient Greece*, Warminster, 1992, pp. 312-322; D. L. Cairns, *Aidos: the Psychology and Ethics of Honour and Shame in Ancient Greek Literature*, Oxford-New York, 1993, pp. 229-230, 236-239.

¹¹ In a similar arrogant way Creon expresses his mind on the gods' matter in *Ant.* 777-780. On the other hand, Haemon's accusation also focuses on his father's disrespect toward the gods: see e.g. 745, 748-749.

dering on *hybris*¹². This similarity is further confirmed by the occurrences in *Aiix* of other categories of words which in *Antigone* describe Creon's lack of good sense, namely *μωρία*- and *μανία*-words¹³.

2. *Μωρία*

As to the *μωρία*-words in *Antigone*, I showed how, despite one reference to Antigone, they are peculiar of Creon and of his specific and real foolishness, which mostly consists of negligence of gods' laws¹⁴. In *Aiix*, except for one case, the word occurs to describe a similar kind of foolishness which may belong not only to *Aiix*, but also to those people who show no respect for gods' laws, or for the interpreters of gods' will. In either way, the lack of good sense results in an act of *hybris*. *Μωρία* is used by *Aiix* himself when, by realizing what he has done, he considers himself as one devoted to the pursuit of foolishness (*Ai.* 406-407): his *μωρία* is closely linked to his *hybris* toward Athena (*Ai.* 401-403). Moreover, the skeptical words by which the chorus replies to the messenger's announcement of Calchas' prophecy are said to be full of *μωρία* (*Ai.* 743-745): not to believe to what a seer suggests on the basis of his divine knowledge is a form of *hybris* in that it means not to care, in a way, of gods' minds. And this is the same form of *hybris* that the *μῶρος* Creon performs when he denies any credibility to Teiresias' interpretation of the omen and to his advice (*Ant.* 998-1045).

More importantly, in *Aiix* the word occurs twice with reference to what in *Antigone* is the explicit mark of Creon's *hybris*, and thus of his foolishness, i.e. the denying of the burial, despite the gods' laws.

Let us analyze these two occurrences:

¹² As to *Aiix*'s ἀφροσύνη, see A. Rademaker, *Sophrosyne and the Rhetoric of Self-restraint. Polysemy & persuasive use of an ancient Greek value term*, Leiden-Boston, 2005, pp. 125-133, who defines it in terms of both insubordination to those in power, and «arrogance on account of his martial prowess» (p. 133). Rademaker mostly bases her analysis on the occurrences of σφροσύνη-words, neglecting the usage of the other φρήν-words which are under discussion here and in the previous paper on *Antigone*. As to other occurrences of φρήν-words, which are not mentioned above, they usually describe the status of mental sanity first lost and then re-gained by *Aiix* (see, e.g., S., *Ai.* 46, 83, 182, 306, 344, 355), or more generally the mental sanity commonly possessed by men (*Ai.* 272). A more specific connotation characterizes the occurrences regarding Agamemnon and Teucer, as I shall discuss above.

¹³ See Lauriola, art. cit., pp. 400-402.

¹⁴ Cf. S., *Ant.* 469-470 and below n. 16.

Ai. 1150¹⁵: through a sort of riddle, Teucer calls Menelaus μῶρος for his intention to persecute the dead, i.e., to refuse Ajax an appropriate burial and thus to dishonor the gods and their laws (*Ai.* 1129-1131). This is exactly the same as Creon's μωρία;

Ai. 1375: the chorus defines μῶρος the one who is not able to realize the wisdom/good sense of Odysseus, who has just persuaded Agamemnon about the right necessity to give Ajax a burial for the sake of gods' laws (*Ai.* 1343-1344). Again, Creon has proved to be such a μῶρος when refusing the wise advice of both Haemon and Teiresias¹⁶.

3. *Μαρία*

As to the *μαρία*-words, except for one case¹⁷, all occurrences are related to Ajax (*Ai.* 59, 81, 216, 611, 726)¹⁸. It might not be surprising that these are the more common terms by which everybody refers to Ajax's foolishness, due to its meaning of madness sent/provoked by a god (*Ai.* 59, 611). And, as implied by both the messenger (*Ai.* 776-777), and Athena (*Ai.* 59-67, 118-133), Ajax's *hybris* toward the goddess has provoked his madness. Like in *Antigone*, *μαρία* mostly represents the status into which a man falls because of his lack of good sense. With regard to this status of *μαρία*, not only does the resemblance between Ajax and Creon depend on the occurrence of the same vocabulary, but it is also confirmed by Creon's eventual admission of the gods' intervention in driving him to a foolish downfall (*Ant.* 1271-1275)¹⁹.

¹⁵ On this line, see also below.

¹⁶ Only once in *Ajax* the adjective μῶρος seems to have a more colorless, so to say, connotation, when it is ascribed to Tecmessa in l. 594. However, it might be interesting to note that in l. 594 the term reflects Ajax's opinion of Tecmessa (μοι δοκεῖς), which means that the woman is not properly defined as μῶρος in the same sense as the others. It is, in other words, a usage similar to that concerning Antigone in S., *Ant.* 469-70 (Lauriola, art. cit., p. 401). Here and elsewhere, I conventionally use the adjective 'colorless' when the term under discussion does not have the same relevant meaning as it mainly has with reference to our topic.

¹⁷ The term seems to be colorless in S., *Ajax* 955 where it aims at emphasizing the depth of the sorrow of Ajax's friends and relatives

¹⁸ Also in S., *Ajax* 452, though the word does not occur, Ajax refers to his «inspired» madness through the phrase λυσσῶδη νόσον, claiming Zeus as responsible.

¹⁹ Cf. also the chorus' words in S., *Ant.* 620-624, which might be regarded as a comment on Creon's *μαρία*.

4. *First Possible Conclusions*

In light of the analysis above proposed, Ajax' foolishness fully resembles that of Creon. As a matter of fact, despite the disobedience issue, which would make him comparable with Antigone, Ajax's foolishness does not include that ascribed to Antigone, as it seems at first glance. This conclusion is based not simply on the fact that Antigone's foolishness is a false one, as argued above, but it is also due to the fact that Ajax's obedience to those in authority is a questionable matter, as shown by Teucer. More than once Atreus' sons evoke Ajax' disrespect of the demand of obedience to the rulers as reason for their denying the burial (*Ai.* 1066-1076, 1231-1234), the same reason that Creon evokes to justify his punishment of Antigone (*Ant.* 449, 473-489, 651-672). But, as Teucer observes, Ajax was not subject to Menelaus' rule (*Ai.*, 1098-1108); he went to fight in Troy as ally, worthy of being considered at the same level as Menelaus himself. More importantly, he went to Troy because of an oath that bound him (*Ai.* 1113-1114), as well as any suitors of Helen²⁰. We may thus conclude that as the disobedience of Antigone cannot be regarded as a real act of foolishness, so too that of Ajax: the first is done in obedience of gods' superior laws; the second seems not even to be a form of disobedience. Therefore, Ajax's lack of good sense seems to exclusively resemble that of Creon. With regard to this, it might be worth noting how, in her last speech, Tecmessa points out the meaning of Ajax's death: θεοῖς τέθνηκεν οὗτος, οὐ κείνοισιν [Atreus' sons and Odysseus]... (*Ai.* 970); that is to say Ajax's death eventually satisfies the gods since in this way he pays for his foolishness, which seems not to have anything to do with acts of disobedience to the rulers.

III. FOOLISHNESS AND BURIAL ISSUE: MENELAUS VS. TEUCER AND ODYSSEUS LIKEWISE CREON VS. ANTIGONE-HAEMON AND TEIRESIAS. THE GOOD SENSE OF AGAMEMNON

If Ajax's foolishness, consisting ultimately of arrogant irreverence towards gods, might be regarded as a paradigm of what Creon's real τὸ μὴ φρονεῖν in *Antigone* ends up to be, Menelaus' and, far more, Agamemnon's way of handling the issue of Ajax's burial contributes to further define

²⁰ See Hes., *Fr.* 196-204; Apollod. 3.131; Hyg., *Fab.* 81.

what τὸ φρονεῖν means and how a man can come into possession of it, which is exactly what in *Antigone* Creon fails. As discussed in my previous work and implied in the above discussion²¹, obstinacy in terms of lack of flexibility can be regarded as a specific trait of Creon's foolishness, such a trait that is evident in his refusing to listen to those who are able to εὖ λέγειν and to give εὐβουλία, due to the bold confidence in his own δόξα. And it is this obstinacy and lack of flexibility that ultimately provokes Creon's downfall. He has the chance to see where the real foolishness lies, and thus the chance to respect gods' laws, but he insists on μὴ κατ' ἄνθρωπον φρονεῖν, by ironically accusing the real wise, i.e., Antigone and Haemon, of a similar kind of foolish pride. In *Aiix*, Creon's foolishness in terms of disrespect towards gods' laws is potentially embodied by Menelaus and Agamemnon as well, and it is successfully counteracted by Teucer and Odysseus, who might be regarded respectively as the equivalent to Antigone and Haemon-Teiresias.

Menelaus is the first who shows up to forbid Ajax's burial (*Ai.* 1047-1048): he has the power to deliver such a prohibition because of the authority he has as ruler of the army (*Ai.* 1050). He states that he has the right to decide such a thing since Ajax, brought as φίλος ('friend': 1053), has been found as more than an enemy (*Ai.* 1054). Enemy and traitors do not deserve an appropriate burial²². Friend-enemy motif namely in relation with the burial issue clearly reminds us of *Antigone's* plot²³. Moreover, the reference of Menelaus to the city's laws that are able to guarantee safety and good order—and this is the duty of a ruler (*Ai.* 1073-1076)—shows some similarities with the ruling philosophy of Creon, i.e., the speech that he delivers for two specific purposes: first, to justify his decree against the burial of Polynices, who, like Ajax, has been found enemy (*Ant.* 162-210); second, to justify his irrevocable intention to punish Antigone (*Ant.* 639-678)²⁴.

²¹ See Lauriola, art. cit., pp. 402-403.

²² Similarly in S., *Ant.* 18-206, 518, 522.

²³ On this motif, see M. W. Blundell, *Helping Friends and Harming Enemies: A Study in Sophocles and Greek Ethics*, Cambridge-New York, 1989; also M. C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*, Cambridge-New York, 1986, pp. 55-58.

²⁴ A little differently from Creon's ruling-philosophy, Menelaus insists on two concepts: not only respect, but also fear might make the laws of a city successfully work. However, the main concern of Creon and Menelaus is the same: to keep safe the city by eliminating any form of insubordination and disobedience.

Teucer, like Antigone, defends the right of the dead, and precisely of a relative/friend dead, by evoking «the gods' laws» (*Ai.* 1129-1131), for which Menelaus seems not to care to such a point that, like Creon by Antigone (*Ant.* 469-470), so is he called μῶρος (*Ai.* 1150), too. Menelaus' μωρία is also explicitly pointed out by the chorus when, though granting him the ability to lay down wise judgments, it suggests him not to commit *hybris* against the dead, thus —one can add— against the related gods' laws (*Ai.* 1091-1092). The wise judgments that the chorus ascribes to Menelaus concern the ruling philosophy he has just illustrated. It is a partial acknowledgment of the ruler's wisdom which in *Antigone*, too, the chorus grants to Creon (*Ant.* 683)²⁵. Moreover, as Antigone is foolish and characterized by τὸ μέγα φρονεῖν in Creon's eyes, so is Teucer in Menelaus' eyes (*Ai.* 1120, 1142). As that of Antigone, so that of Teucer is a holy pride in obedience of gods' laws. Therefore it is not a real form of insolence toward those who are in authority since —as Teucer more explicitly declares— ξὺν τῷ δικαίῳ γὰρ μέγ' ἔξεστιν φρονεῖν (*Ai.* 1125).

The motif of justice in terms of respect for gods characterizes Haemon's arguments, too, in his struggle with his father (*Ant.* 727, 743). Like Antigone, Haemon, too, accuses, in a way, Creon of dishonoring the gods (*Ant.* 745, 749); like Antigone, Haemon, too, is foolish and is marked by τὸ μέγα φρονεῖν in Creon's eyes. Teucer thus shares all of these characteristics in his confrontation with Menelaus, as well as Menelaus potentially shares Creon's traits.

The confrontation between Agamemnon and Teucer with the essential intervention by Odysseus accomplishes what remains unsolved in the confrontation with Menelaus, in terms of making a definite decision with regard to the burial, and of serving as moral paradigm. Agamemnon, too, looks at Teucer as an insolent man who dares utter strong words against the rulers, by thus showing a lack of good sense and of self-restraint (*Ai.* 1226-1228; 1251-1259). In Agamemnon's speech to Teucer, the occurrence of terms having φρήν, νοῦς, σωφροσύνη resembles the ones we found apt to indicate the foolishness in terms of disobedience to those who are in authority, both in *Antigone* and in *Aiix*. With regard to Teucer, it is possible to talk of a false, apparent foolishness, too, since Teucer is not arbitrarily disobeying, or arbi-

²⁵ It must be noted, however, that the chorus of *Antigone* does not specify so clearly the «defect» of that wisdom, i.e., the involved irreverence of dead and gods' laws, as the chorus of *Aiix* actually did.

trarily acting as insolent with Agamemnon. He is so in Agamemnon's eyes, but his pride is a just one (*Ai.* 1125), since he is defending superior laws.

The focus, as a matter of fact, quickly and significantly shifts to an indirect definition of what τὸ φρονεῖν, and thus σωφρονεῖν and τὸν νοῦν ἔχειν, really mean in spite of the personal, human thoughts of a ruler, and in favor of «the gods' laws». When Odysseus intervenes, Agamemnon proves to possess the ability to εἶ φρονεῖν by agreeing to listen to a person who is able to give good advice. «I should be foolish (εἶην οὐκ ἂν εἶ φρονῶν) not to let you...», replies Agamemnon to Odysseus' request to speak (*Ai.* 1330). More significantly, Agamemnon demonstrates good sense by accepting the advice to bury Ajax in obedience to the gods' laws, although this means to dismiss his own laws: to dishonor a dead is to destroy the laws of gods (*Ai.* 1342-1344). This is Odysseus' warning, similar to those given, directly or allusively, by Antigone, Haemon and Teiresias to Creon. Though it is hard, Agamemnon eventually decides to honor his friend, Odysseus, who gives the good advice (*Ai.* 1351)²⁶, which consists of making him avoid disrespect towards gods by allowing Ajax's burial in honor and obedience of οἱ θεῶν νόμοι (*Ai.* 1343). This is to be «just» and «wise» (*Ai.* 1363, 1374). Agamemnon thus avoids yielding to the foolishness which characterizes Creon: he does listen to good advice, he does yield to the gods, no matter how he hates Ajax —as well as Creon hated Polynices—. Where Antigone, Haemon and Teiresias fail, Teucer and Odysseus succeed; and where Creon fails, Agamemnon succeeds.

IV. CONCLUSION: THE LESSON OF *AIAX* AND ITS RELEVANCE FOR *ANTIGONE*

τοιαῦτα τοίνυν εἰσορῶν ὑπέρκοπον
μηδέν ποτ' εἵπησ' αὐτὸς ἐς θεοὺς ἔπος,
μηδ' ὄγκον ἄρη μηδέν', εἴ τινας πλέον
ἢ χειρὶ βρίθεις ἢ μακροῦ πλούτου βάθει.
ὥς ἡμέρα κλίνει τε κἀνάγει πάλιν
ἅπαντα τάνθρωπεια· τοὺς δὲ σώφρονας
θεοὶ φιλοῦσι καὶ στυγοῦσι τοὺς κακοῦς. (S., *Ai.* 127-133)

²⁶ The ability to give good advice is expressed by εὐλέγειν (S., *Ai.* 1351). It might be interesting to note that the same terminology occur to connote the good advice which Creon —differently from Agamemnon— refuses to listen to and to learn from (S., *Ant.* 723, 1032).

This is, in the end, the lesson that the tragic story of Ajax must give, such a lesson which is illustrated throughout the play not simply by the fate of Ajax but also by the behavior of Agamemnon, a character who has a little space and yet plays an important role. This feature and the lexical and thematic similarities, that, as we saw, *Ajax* and *Antigone* present, allows us to look at these two specific tragedies as «supporting» each other's ultimate meaning.

Let us further examine the results of the analysis we have carried on, in order to draw a conclusion.

As in the second part of *Antigone* little space is reserved for the heroine, and her deeds and disappearance are almost completely forgotten, to a point that some scholars think of Creon as being the real main character²⁷, so seems it to happen to Ajax' deeds in the second part of the homonymous play. And, while in the second part of *Antigone* the focus is on the foolish obstinacy of Creon, the ruler, to rely on his laws and thoughts without caring for the gods' mind in relation with the burial issue, in the second part of *Ajax* the focus is on potentially the same kind of foolishness of Menelaus, and, more importantly, on the wise flexibility that eventually Agamemnon, the ruler, shows by acting as the one who really has τὸ φρονεῖν since he respects the gods' laws with reference to the same issue.

In light of the final lines in *Antigone* (1347-1352)²⁸, which contain a lesson comparable to the one implied by Athena's words in *Ajax* (127-133), it is also worth re-considering the following specifics:

(a) both Ajax and Agamemnon —as they are qualified and presented by Sophocles in *Ajax*— contribute to define Creon's foolishness in terms of *hybris* toward the gods, namely Ajax by analogy because of his pride and confidence in his own power and thought; Agamemnon by contrast for his eventual flexibility and lack of obstinacy;

(b) both tragedies are characterized by the foolishness-wisdom motif with reference to the burial issue, which is developed —to a different degree— in terms of contrast between those who seem to be foolish, but they are revealed

²⁷ See Lauriola, art. cit., pp. 389-391.

²⁸ «Having good sense is by far the foremost rule of happiness; when we deal with gods we should never act with irreverence. Mighty words of boastful men are paid for with mighty blows which teach sound thinking at last in old age». The translation is adapted from R. Blondell, *Sophocles' Antigone. Introduction, Translation and Essay*, Newburyport, 1998.

to be so only in the other's eyes (Antigone, Haemon, Teucer)²⁹, and those who seem to be wise, but they are eventually revealed to be foolish (Creon, partly Menelaus, and whoever does not recognize the wisdom of Odysseus' good advice);

(c) both tragedies hint, to a different degree and with different outcome, at the fact that it is good and wise to learn from the others, to listen to those who εὖ λέγουσιν³⁰, i.e., to yield when necessary rather than persist in one's own mistakes because of pride.

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²⁹ As to *Ai*ax, as discussed above, the foolishness and lack of self-restraint in terms of disobedience to his superiors can be regarded, in a way, as real only in others' eyes, namely in his enemies' eyes, if we consider the status of *Ai*ax as peer and not as inferior, as Teucer claims in *S.*, *Ai.* 1097-1117.

³⁰ See, e.g., *S.*, *Ant.* 723, 1032; *S.*, *Ai.* 1351.